

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-02

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15

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P R 251713 Z MAY 73

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1505

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

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E. O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINS, UK

SUBJECT: REACTION TO BRITISH SEX SCANDAL

REF: LONDON 6089, LONDON 6152

1. PARTY, PRESS AND PUBLIC REACTION TO PM HEATH'S MAY 24 STATEMENT IN COMMONS CONCERNING THE BACKGROUND AND REASONS FOR THE RESIGNATION OF TWO GOVERNMENT MINISTERS HAVE BEEN QUITE POSITIVE AND UNDERSTANDING. THIS REACTION IS CONDITIONED, HOWEVER, BY TWO FACTORS. ONE IS AN AWARENESS THAT THE INVESTIGATION MAY YET BRING TO LIGHT THE INVOLVEMENT OF FURTHER PUBLIC FIGURES, THOUGH HEATH'S ASSERTION THAT THERE ARE NO GROUNDS FOR SUPPOSING THAT OTHER MINISTERS OR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE WERE INVOLVED SEEMS WIDELY ACCEPTED. THE OTHER IS A GENERAL BELIEF THAT, IN JUDGING THE BEHAVIOR OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN RELATION TO CONTEMPORARY MORES, A HIGHER STANDARD MAY PROPERLY BE DEMANDED BY THE PUBLIC THAN IT WOULD ACCEPT FOR ITS NEIGHBORS NEXT DOOR.

2. COMMENT: THERE IS BOUND TO BE A CONTINUED HIGH PUBLIC (AND PRURIENT) INTEREST IN THE DETAILS OF THE
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SEX SCANDAL AS THEY ARE REVEALED IN THE PRESS. THESE ARE LIKELY TO SHOW THAT OTHER PUBLICLY KNOWN FIGURES WERE ALSO INVOLVED. NEVERTHELESS, WE JUDGE THAT THE DAMAGE TO THE HEATH GOVT HAS ALREADY BEEN LIMITED AND, GIVEN NO DRAMATIC NEW REVELATIONS, WILL BE CONFINED TO THE FAIRLY SHORT TERM. IN PARTY POLITICAL TERMS, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE INCLINATION TO ATTEMPT TO DERIVE MUCH PROFIT FROM THE CONSERVATIVE GOVT'S EVIDENT EMBARRASSMENT. ONE OBVIOUS REASON FOR THIS IS THAT LABOR LEADERS ARE ALL TOO AWARE THAT, IN GOVT, THEY ALSO MIGHT ONE DAY FACE A SIMILAR SITUATION. ANNENBERG

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*** Current Classification *** LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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